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ABSTRACT

A followup survey was conducted of baccalaureate-level graduates of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Department of Social Work to develop a database on graduates' career activities and to determine the market for the Masters of Social Work (MSW) program as well as graduates' view of the efficacy of the social work major. Of 538 graduates mailed a questionnaire, 172 responded. Findings include the following: 65 percent were either working full-time, part-time, or were enrolled full-time in a graduate social work program; 11 percent had not obtained a social work position; most graduates were employed by agencies in urban areas and most worked for public agencies; most worked in Iowa; most were providing direct client services, while 30 percent were supervisors, coordinators, directors, and in other indirect service positions; males earned $18,032, while females earned $16,342; most were satisfied with their current position, and only 13 percent were dissatisfied; 60 percent believed they were well prepared for entry into social work, and 20 percent thought they were poorly or very poorly prepared; and 22 percent had earned an MSW or were enrolled in graduate studies. Graduates' suggestions for improving the social work program are included. (SW)

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CAREER STATUS OF BACCALAUREATE SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES: AN APPRAISAL OF A PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM

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February 1983

CAREER STATUS OF BACCALAUREATE SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES:

AN APPRAISAL OF A PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM[1]

BACKGROUND

The Department of Social Work at the University of Northern Iowa provides undergraduate education to its 175 majors and participates in the University's General Education program. Located within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Department has grown from one full-time instructor position to seven over the last twelve years. The program growth reflects the need for social work education in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls metropolitan area and also the administrative support of the College and University.

The Department has three broad educational objectives. The first is to prepare social work students for beginning professional practice. The second is to prepare the social work majors for graduate level training. To achieve these objectives, students are provided course work in

1. The structure and functions of social service programs,
2. The principles of human growth and behavior in social environments,
3. The values and ethics of the social work profession, and
4. Helping techniques, such as the problem-solving process, interviewing, brokering, advocating and mediating to help individuals, families and communities to improve their quality of life.

In the last year, the Department has accepted an additional objective. With the conversion of its introductory social work course to a general

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[1]The authors wish to extend their appreciation to Dr. Kitack E. Suh, Mr. David Pan and the Student Social Work Association for their assistance in this study.

education course, the Department contributes to the liberal arts education of non-majors.

Department personnel, partly as a reflection of their community service work, are keenly aware of the economic deterioration and continuing social problems in the United States. This economic deterioration may be related to steady or declining resources going into human services programs and higher education. Such developments lead to increased accountability requirements in human services agencies and educational programs. The acquisition of follow-up information from a Department's graduated students can provide useful program evaluation information to meet accountability needs.

Reflecting the above concerns, the UNI Department of Social Work faculty conducted a follow-up study on its graduates. The study had three major objectives:

1. To develop a beginning data base for finding out graduates' career activities;
2. To determine the market for a UNI-MSW program;
3. To elicit graduates' views about the efficacy of the social work major.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were devised to meet the study objectives:

1. What percentage of graduates are in social work positions?
   a. Are they working in rural areas?
   b. What are their primary duties?
   c. What type of social work agency are they working in?
   d. What are their salaries?

e. What is their satisfaction with their present social work position?

f. What is their satisfaction with the UNI social work preparation?

2. Should an MSW program be developed by the UNI Department of Social Work?

a. Do BSW graduates believe a need exists for graduate social work education?

b. What is the level of interest in enrolling in a UNI-MSW program?

3. What has been the graduate school experience of UNI social work graduates?

4. What suggestions do graduates have for improving the social work program?

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey of the University of Northern Iowa baccalaureate social work graduates for the period 1971-1980 was conducted. A 50 percent sample of the 538 graduates of the program was selected. A two-page, paper-and-pencil questionnaire was mailed to the subjects in May, 1982, and one follow-up letter was sent six weeks later. One hundred seventy-two questionnaires were returned and were suitable for analysis, representing a 68 percent response rate.

The questionnaire, consisting of 19 questions, gathered information about employment history since graduation, graduate education, satisfaction with the social work profession, academic preparation for social work practice, suggestions for improving the social work program, developing an MSW program at the University of Northern Iowa and interest in attending such a program, and demographic data.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows: The majority of respondents were white (96%), female (80%), state residents (71%), and 29 years old. The 80/20 split between females and males reflects the national average for undergraduate programs, which is 84 percent female and 16 percent male. The 4 percent non-white rate reflects the racial composition of Iowa.

FINDINGS

Employment Status

Preparation for a "beginning level of practice" is the primary purpose of baccalaureate social work education, according to the Council on Social Work Education, as reflected in its recent curriculum policy statement. Table 1 indicates that approximately two-thirds of the respondents are employed full or part-time and a few are enrolled full time in graduate social work programs or seeking a social work position. Only 20 graduates (12 percent) have never held a social work position. While it appears that some may want to practice social work, others may have chosen social work as a base for work in other professions and fields. Perhaps the following comments from a respondent, who is currently working for a bank, reflect this belief: "I enjoyed my education at UNI immensely. I have to admit that I wasn't seriously aiming at social work as a profession. My education has helped me immensely in understanding people and their problems in the jobs I have held." Graduates who have never held a social work position are in fields such as nursing, teaching, computer programming and hold positions in related fields, such as administrative assistant for personnel, customer counselor at a bank, and program staff member for the handicapped at a residential center.

Those who have held social work positions, but who are working in other fields (16%) or who are currently not employed (5%), reflect various factors. Current economic conditions and cutbacks in federal and state funds for social services have affected at least 10 graduates who were laid off; some were unemployed at the time of the study, while others had found non-social work positions. Some graduates have voluntarily left the work force to have children, relocate to a new state, or travel. Others are working in related positions such as fraud investigator, psychologist, employee benefits coordinator, education specialist for an infant/parent program, corrections instructor, policies and procedures administrator for a bank, pre-school teacher, client manager for exceptional children in day care, and elementary teacher.

These findings strongly support the premise that graduates of the University of Northern Iowa's undergraduate social work program are being successfully educated for social work practice. Very few graduates have failed to obtain social work positions. Others have found work in related fields, perhaps as a consequence of their social work education.

Table 1. Employment Status of Social Work Graduates for 1971-1980

Employment Status	Sex		Age		Totals	
	Female	Male	≤ 29	≥ 30	N	%
A. In Social Work						
Full Time	71	20	50	41	91	53%
Part Time	17	0	7	10	17	10%
Graduate Social Work Education	0	3	2	1	13	2%
Looking for SW job	2	3	4	1	5	3%
SUB-TOTAL	90	26	63	53	116	68%
B. Out-of-Social Work						
Currently Employed						
Never held SW job	16	1	12	5	17	9%
Had SW job	21	7	18	10	28	16%
Not Employed						
Never had SW job	2	0	2	0	2	1%
Had SW job	8	0	5	3	8	5%
Never Employed	1	0	0	1	1	1%
SUB-TOTAL	48	8	37	19	56	32%
GRAND TOTAL	138	34	100	72	172	100%

Social Work Employment Characteristics

The following section details selected social work employment characteristics of the 91 full-time and 17 part-time practicing social workers. Information pertaining to community size of employing agency, agency auspices, type of position, state of employment and Iowa city of employment, salaries, level of satisfaction with present position, and quality of social work preparation for practice is presented in Tables 2 through 9.

Community Size. As presented in Table 2, almost 70 percent are employed in urban areas. Only six graduates were employed in a rural setting.

Of the 20 male social workers, 13 were employed in urban agencies, seven in agencies in small towns, and none in rural areas. Most females worked in urban agencies but six were employed in rural communities.

Table 2. Employment of Graduates by Community Size

Community Size	Social Work Employment					
	Full Time		Part Time		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Urban	61	67	13	76	74	69
Small town	24	26	4	24	28	26
Rural	6	7	0	0	6	6
TOTALS	91	100%	17	100%	108	101%*

* Rounding error

Agency Auspices. As indicated in Table 3, over two-thirds of the full-time practitioners are employed in public agencies, primarily in county departments of social services. Part-time employees, however, tend to work in the private sector. Full-time female employees (31%) also tended to work more in the private/voluntary sector than male workers (17%).

Table 3. Employment of Graduates by Auspice

Type of Auspice	Social Work Employment					
	Full Time		Part Time		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	62	70	5	31	67	64
Private/ Voluntary	24	27	9	56	33	32
Private Practice	0	0	1	6	1	1
Business Corporation	2	2	1	6	3	3
TOTALS	88	99%*	16	99%*	104	100%

* Rounding error

Social Work Positions. Table 4 presents information for full and part-time social work positions. For full-time workers, a breakdown by sex is shown. Most social workers are employed in staff positions providing direct services to clients. Females, both full-time and part-time workers, hold staff positions in slightly larger numbers than males. While 18 percent of the women have become supervisors, none are agency directors, whereas two men have obtained agency directorates. While the data is not conclusive, men appear to be moving into administrative positions more than women. Those holding supervisory and coordinator positions primarily work for state departments of social services, hospitals, juvenile court services, and residential facilities.

Table 4. Employment of Graduates by Position

Social Work Positions	Social Work Employment Status							
	Full Time				Part Time		Totals	
	Male		Female					
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Staff	11	55	52	73	12	71	75	69
Supervisor	3	15	13	18	0	0	16	15
Coordinator	3	15	4	6	1	6	8	7
Director	2	10	0	0	0	0	2	2
Other	1	5	2	3	4	23	7	6
TOTALS	20	100%	71	100%	17	100%	108	99*

* Rounding error

Social Work Employment by State. Most graduates of the University of Northern Iowa's social work program live in Iowa. All but two part-time practitioners are employed in Iowa and 78 percent of the full-time workers practice in Iowa. Of the 20 males, 17 or 85 percent work in Iowa, whereas

76 percent of the fulltime females are working in Iowa. As indicated in Table 5 another 12 percent practice social work in states not far from Iowa.

Table 5. Employment of Graduates by State

States	Social Work Employment					
	Full Time		Part Time		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Iowa	71	78	15	88	86	80
Minnesota	4	4	0	0	4	4
Ohio	2	2	0	0	2	2
Wisconsin	2	2	0	0	2	2
Kansas	2	2	0	0	2	2
Missouri	2	2	0	0	2	2
Other States (9)	8	9	2	12	10	9
TOTALS	91	99%*	17	100%	108	101%*

* Rounding error

Social Work Employment by Iowa City. The University of Northern Iowa is located in Cedar Falls, in the northeast part of the state. Waterloo adjoins Cedar Falls and is a primary site for field instruction placements. Most social service agencies serving this region are located in Waterloo. Not surprisingly, 41 percent of the full and part-time social workers are practicing in Waterloo and Cedar Falls. Ten percent work in Des Moines and many others work within 60 miles of Cedar Falls.

Table 6. Employment of Graduates by Iowa City

Iowa Cities	Social Work Employment					
	Full Time		Part Time		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Waterloo	21	30	8	53	29	34
Des Moines	9	13	0	0	9	10
Cedar Falls	6	8	0	0	6	7
Mason City	4	6	0	0	4	5
Decorah	5	7	0	0	5	6
Cedar Rapids	3	4	0	0	3	3
Others	23	32	7	47	30	35
TOTALS	71	100%	15	100%	86	100%

Social Work Salaries. Table 7 presents salary information for full-time workers, by sex, and for part-time practitioners. The highest annual salary reported by a social worker was $27,500. The highest salary was reported by a Ph.D. psychologist who earned $68,000. The mean salary for males is $18,032, whereas the mean salary for females working full-time is $16,842, representing a difference of $1,190. A larger percentage of males earn $20,000 or more (35%) than females (23%). Only one male earns less than $14,000, whereas 17 females do, representing a difference of 20 percent. Part-time workers, with one exception, earn less than $12,000.

For those earning $20,000 or more, the average number of years of practice is 6.45. Males averaged 6.57 years and females averaged 6.41 years. Of the 17 females, 10 had obtained or were obtaining a master's degree in social work (M.S.W.), whereas only three of seven males had obtained an M.S.W.

T-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant

differences with respect to sex, age, years worked full-time position, and satisfaction with present position. The findings indicate that while males earned $1,190 more annually than females, this difference was not statistically significant. Younger employees (29 and younger) earned $15,573, whereas older practitioners earned $18,747 ($p \leq .001$). Practitioners who worked four or less years earned $14,523, whereas those who worked five or more years earned $19,146 ($p \leq .001$). Those who were satisfied with their current position earned significantly more ($17,718) than those who were not satisfied ($15,087) ($p \leq .01$). Direct service practitioners earned $16,491, whereas those in indirect service positions earned $18,604 ($p \leq .02$).

In general, older practitioners who are in indirect service positions and who have practiced for at least five years and are satisfied with their current position earn significantly more than those who do not share these characteristics.

Table 7. Salaries of Graduates

Amount	Social Work Employment							
	Full Time				Part Time		Totals	
	Male		Female					
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 10,000	0	0	4	6	13	76	17	16
10 M < 12 M	0	0	4	6	3	18	7	7
12 M < 14 M	1	5	9	13	0	0	10	9
14 M < 16 M	4	20	10	14	0	0	14	13
16 M < 18 M	5	25	15	22	0	0	20	19
18 M < 20 M	3	15	11	16	0	0	14	13
20 M < 22 M	5	25	7	10	0	0	12	11
22 M < 24 M	1	5	4	6	0	0	5	5
24 M < 26 M	1	5	4	6	0	0	5	5
26 M < 28 M	0	0	1	1	1	6	2	2
TOTALS	20	100%	69	100%	17	100%	106	100%

Satisfaction With Social Work Position. Most of the graduates are satisfied or strongly satisfied with their current social work position. There is virtually no difference between those in direct service positions and those serving as supervisors, coordinators, directors, or other indirect service positions. More men (86%) reported job satisfaction than women (77%). Of the 22 practitioners earning $20,000 or more, only one indicated she was not satisfied with her position, suggesting a positive relationship between satisfaction with position and income.

Table 8. Satisfaction with Present Social Work Position

Collapsed Responses	Social Work Employment											
	Full Time				Part Time				Totals			
	Staff		Supervisor and others		Staff		Supervisor and others		Staff		Supervisor and others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Satisfied	47	78	22	79	12	100	2	67	59	82	24	77
No Opinion	6	10	2	7	0	0	1	33	6	8	3	10
Dissatisfied	7	12	4	14	0	0	0	0	7	10	4	13
TOTALS	60	100%	28	100%	12	100%	3	100%	72	100%	31	100%

Preparation for Practice. Quality of undergraduate social work preparation for entry into social work is presented in Table 9. The findings are mixed. More males in staff positions believed they were less well prepared than females in staff positions. Males in indirect service positions, however, believed they were well prepared for practice. Females in indirect service positions expressed less satisfaction with their academic preparation than either females in staff positions or males in indirect service positions. Interestingly, five of the six males who indicated they were not well prepared for practice earn less than $20,000 and not one of the six has entered any graduate program. Of the 12 females who expressed dissatisfaction with social work education, 10 earn less than $20,000.

Table 9. Quality of Undergraduate Social Work Preparation for Social Work Practice, for Full Time Practitioners

Collapsed Responses	Staff				Indirect Service				Totals	
	Male		Female		Male		Female			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Well Prepared	4	36	32	64	6	67	11	58	53	60
No Opinion	2	18	9	18	2	22	5	26	18	20
Not Well Prepared	5	45	9	18	1	11	3	16	18	20
TOTALS	11	99%*	50	100%	9	100%	19	100%	89	100%

*Rounding error

Market Analysis for a UNI--MSW Program. Since 1974, UNI social work graduates and community social workers have been suggesting the need for the UNI social work program to develop a graduate program. A 1976 survey, a 1980 survey, and this study continue to confirm this need, as indicated in Table 10. Apparently, having only one graduate program in Iowa is not sufficient.

Table 10. Should UNI Develop an MSW Program?

Response	N	%
Yes	139	81
No	8	5
Don't know	24	14
No answer	1	0
TOTAL	172	100%

A follow-up question asked graduates if they would enroll in an M.S.W. program if it were developed at UNI. Table 11 indicates that 47 (27%) would enroll in a UNI--MSW program and 46 (27%) indicated "maybe." The support for

graduate education is clearly evident in order to meet the needs of BSW graduates from UNI and to meet the needs of many other practitioners and others interested in a social work career.

Table 11. Interest in Enrolling in a UNI--MSW Program

Response	In SW		Out of SW		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	34	32	13	20	47	27
No	16	15	34	52	50	29
Maybe	32	30	14	21	46	27
Not applicable	24	23	4	6	28	16
No answer	0	0	1	61	1	1
TOTAL	106	100%	66	100%	172	100%

Actual Graduate Study Status of Respondents. Although the primary purpose of undergraduate social work education is to prepare graduates for employment at the beginning professsional level, a number do go on to graduate education. To determine this number, questions were included to find out which respondents had gone on to graduate education and in what type of major, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Actual Graduate Study Status

Response	MSW		Counseling		Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Completed	20	42	1	9	5	39	25	15
In Progress	17	35	6	55	6	46	29	17
Dropped Out	11	23	4	36	3	15	17	10
None	--		--		--		101	58
TOTALS	48	100%	11	100%	14	100%	172	100%

Of the 172 total respondents, 37 (22%) have earned an MSW or are in a program now. Of the 116 in social work, the 37 represent 32 percent.

Suggestions for Improving the Social Work Program

Field Instruction. The most frequent suggestion for improving the social work program was to require more field work training. (The respondents took field work in their senior year when 340-360 hours in the agencies were required.) The next most frequent suggestions were that field work be taken before students' last semester and that more than one agency experience be offered. The fourth major suggestion was that more supervision should be provided by the Department's field work coordinator.

In response to a recently increased field work hour requirement by the Council on Social Work Education, the present 360 field work hours requirement is being increased by the faculty to 440. Also, more field work concurrent seminars are being provided than in the past. An increase in required volunteer hours for social work majors has been made recently by the social work faculty. The integration of the volunteer experience with the second social work course has been improved over the last few years.

Social Work Courses. The most frequently mentioned suggestion to improve courses was to have more content on counseling/therapy. The next most frequent responses were to place more focus on practical work and less on theories and to have more emphasis on law and social work. A number of suggestions for specific courses were made. These may well have been made, however, by students who had graduated before the present range of required and elective courses in social work was developed. A list of suggested courses as they relate to present courses in the Department follows:

Graduates' Suggestions for Courses	Curriculum Status in the Department
1. Crisis Intervention	1. Practice I and II are required.
2. Medical Social Work	2. Social Services in Health Care Settings was developed, as an elective, in 1978. A full "area of specialization" was developed in 1980.
3. Social Policy	3. Social Policies and Issues is required.
4. Protective Services for Children	4. Child Welfare was developed, as an elective, in 1978. A full "area of specialization" was developed in 1980.
5. Women's Courses	5. UNI has recently developed a Women's Studies minor.
6. Funding and Budgeting	6. This content is included in Human Services Administration, which was developed as an elective in 1979. The "area of specialization" was developed in 1980.
7. Assertion Training	7. This course is not provided at this time.
8. Interviewing Skills	8. This content is included in Practice I and II and Therapeutic Communication.
9. Grant Writing	9. This content is included in Human Services Administration, an elective, since 1980.
10. Work with the Aged	10. Social Services for the Aged was developed, as an elective, in 1979.
11. Stress Management	11. Stress and Stress Management for the Helping Professions was developed, as an elective, in 1981.
12. Drugs and Alcohol	12. Alcoholism was developed as an elective in 1978. The Psychology Department has a course on drugs. The "area of specialization" was developed in 1980.

13.	Psychopathology	13. Mental Deviance and Mental Health Institutions was developed, as an elective, in 1976.
14.	School Social Work	14. Bachelor's degree level social workers cannot be employed in Iowa schools; they must have their MSWs. This course would be more appropriately offered at the graduate level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken primarily to ascertain the career status of graduates of the baccalaureate social work program of the University of Northern Iowa. Additionally, suggestions for improving social work courses and field instruction were obtained, thus allowing the faculty to consider curriculum changes. Finally, a preliminary needs assessment was conducted to determine if a need existed for a graduate social work program at the University of Northern Iowa.

The primary objective of the social work program is to prepare students for entry into the social work field, upon graduation with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work. The program has been successful in achieving this objective. Currently, 65 percent of the social work graduates are either working full-time, part-time, or are enrolled full-time in a graduate social work program. Only 11 percent have never obtained a social work position and all but 2 percent have not worked since graduation.

Most graduates are employed by agencies in urban areas and most work for public agencies. The UNI social work graduates overwhelmingly work in Iowa, thereby serving people of the State of Iowa. Practitioners tend to work in the northeastern portion of the state, where the University of Northern Iowa is located.

While most graduates are providing direct services to clients in a

variety of social service agencies, 30 percent are now serving as supervisors, coordinators, directors, and in other indirect service positions. The graduates earn an average annual salary of $17,109; males earn $18,032 and females earn $16,842, reflecting a difference of $1,190. Most practitioners are satisfied with their current position and only 13 percent are dissatisifed.

While 91 are employed full-time, 17 graduates have secured part-time employment. Interestingly, all are females. For most, their part-time employment status is preferred. A few are enrolled in graduate programs and many choose to balance professional employment with family responsibilities. Some cannot find full-time employment. Five are employed in hospitals, three in nursing homes, and three are therapists, of whom one is in private practice. Their incomes vary. Most are paid an annual salary, while three are paid by the hour. One is both in private practice and works for a clinic. Her combined income is $26,000. The annual salary for those who work half-time is approximately $8,860.

The quality of the undergraduate social work program in terms of preparing graduates for entry into social work practice was examined. Of concern is that only 60 percent of the graduates believed they were well prepared for entry into social work. However, only 20 percent thought they were poorly or very poorly prepared. It is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the "No Opinion" response which 20 percent checked.

The University of Northern Iowa Department of Social Work offers one field instruction placement in the students' senior year. This placement currently requires 360 hours of agency service (to be increased to 440 hours) and may be taken in either semester or during the summer. Students may take the agency placement either concurrently, which is usually three days each

week for the entire semester, or in block, which is typically full-time in an agency for the first nine weeks of the semester. Suggestions for improving field work focused for the most part on increasing the number of hours in agencies or increasing the number of agency placements. Graduates expressed a concern that they receive greater exposure to clients and agencies, so that their academic learning might be more relevant and timely.

Suggestions for improving social work courses primarily reflected the graduates' desire for more specialized courses and courses that allowed for micro-level skill development. Most of the suggestions from graduates have been implemented in recent years at UNI.

While 22 percent of the 172 respondents have earned an MSW or are currently enrolled in a graduate social work program, many more would apparently seek out this opportunity, if a program were available in the northeast part of the state. Over 80 percent of the respondents believed that the University of Northern Iowa should offer a graduate program in social work and 47 (27%) indicated that they would enroll in such a program. Another 27 percent indicated "Maybe." These findings strongly support the need for graduate social work education at the University of Northern Iowa.

In summary, social work graduates through 1980 have found social work positions, are earning relatively good salaries, are satisfied with their jobs, and believe that the University should develop an MSW program.

The Department will accrue follow-up data on a continuous basis.